

LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN

A modern English version by William Needham
of "Lettres portugaises, traduites en français"
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Gabriel-Joseph Guilleragues.

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First Letter

Consider, my love, how grossly lacking in foresight
you have been. Ah, unlucky man, it has deceived you
with false hopes just as you have deceived me. The
passion you relied on to conjure so many delights now
brings you dark despair which is as cruel as the
absence that causes it. And this absence—for which my
sorrow with all its ingenuity cannot find a name
grievous enough—must it, then, for evermore prevent me
from looking into those eyes in which I saw so much
love, eyes that gave me knowledge of feelings that
filled me with joy, that took the place of everything
else and brought me all the satisfaction I needed?
Alas, my own eyes lack the only light that could
enliven them. All they have left is their tears, and
their only use has been for weeping, for weeping
continually ever since I learned that you had finally
decided to go away. I cannot bear it. I will die an
early death.

And yet it seems to me that I am somehow clinging to
the miseries of which you alone are the cause. I gave
my life to you the moment I first saw you, and I still
feel a certain pleasure in sacrificing it to you. I
send you my sighs a thousand times each day. They seek
you everywhere. What they bring back to me as full
recompense for so many anxieties is the all-too-true
warning of my approaching wretchedness, whose cruelty
will not allow me any pride but is telling me: "Stop,
poor luckless Mariana, stop tormenting yourself for no
purpose; stop looking for a lover you will never see
again. He is now in France surrounded by pleasures. He
gives not a moment's thought to your sorrows. He
releases you from all memory of your raptures; he
shows not a shred of gratitude to you."

But no, I cannot bring myself to judge you so
insultingly. I am far too interested in vindicating
you. I am unwilling to think that you have forgotten
me. Am I not unhappy enough already without torturing
myself with false suspicions? And why should I try so
hard to erase the memory of all the trouble you took
to prove your love for me? I was so charmed by all
your attentions that I would indeed be ungrateful if I
did not love you with the same abandon my own passion
gave me when I enjoyed the proofs of yours? How can it

be that remembering such delicious moments should hurt so? And why must they (contrary to their own nature) serve only to tyrannise my heart?

Alas, your last letter reduced my heart to a strange state. I could feel its movements and it seemed as if it were trying hard to detach itself from me to go and find you. I was so overcome with all these violent emotions that I was bereft of all my senses for more than three hours. I held back from returning to the life I had lived for you, had lost because of you, and could not preserve for you. Reluctantly I found myself again. I flattered myself with the notion that I was dying of love. And besides, it suited me to think that I would no longer have to witness my heart being rent by the agony of your absence. Ever since these unforeseen events I have suffered all sorts of ailments. But will I ever be free of them if I do not see you? Yet I suffer without a murmur because they are on account of you.

So, is that, then, to be my reward from you for having loved you so tenderly? Not that it matters. I am determined to adore you all my life and to never look at another. Believe me, you will do no better loving someone else. Could you be satisfied with a passion less ardent than mine? Perhaps you will find beauty greater than mine (although you once told me that I was beautiful enough) but you will never find so much love; all the rest counts for nothing. Do not fill your letters with unnecessary things any more. And do not tell me again to remember you. I cannot forget you. Nor can I forget also that you have given me hope that you will return and spend some time with me.

Alas, why do you not wish to spend the whole of your life here? If it were possible for me to leave this miserable cloister I would not remain here in Portugal, waiting for your promise to be fulfilled. I would let nothing stand in my way. I would search for you, follow you, love you, anywhere in the world. I dare not flatter myself by imagining that this can ever happen. I do not want to feed a hope that would most surely give me pleasure when all I want is to feel the pains of my sorrow. Nevertheless I admit that the opportunity my brother gave me to write to you has surprised certain feelings of joy in me and has suspended for a short while the despair in which I dwell. I implore you to tell me why you were so bent on charming me as you did when you knew full well that you would abandon me, and why you have tried very hard to make me unhappy. Would that you had left me in peace in my cloister. Had I wronged you in some way?

I am sorry: please forgive me. I have no cause to accuse you. I am in no state to be thinking of avenging myself, and I blame only the severity of my fate. It seems to me that fate, in separating us has done us all the harm we could fear. But it did not know how to separate our hearts. Love (more powerful

than fate) has united our hearts for the rest of our lives. If you are still interested in my life then write to me often. Let me know the state of your heart and how the world is treating you: it is not too much for me to ask. Above all, come and see me. Adieu. I cannot leave this sheet of paper. You will take it into your hands. Would the same good fortune could befall me. Alas, I may have lost my proper senses but I fully realise that it is not possible. I cannot go any further. Adieu. Love me always and let me suffer even more.

Second Letter

It appears to me that I am doing the greatest possible wrong to the feelings of my heart by trying to reveal them to you on paper. How happy I would be if you could judge them by the force of your own feelings. But I must not rely on you, and I cannot help saying, in a manner that is far calmer than the way I actually feel, that you should not treat me as badly as you do by forgetting me because it drives me to despair and even brings shame on you. It is only fair that I be allowed to complain of the misfortunes I clearly foresaw when I realised you were bent on leaving me. I well know now that I had misled myself in thinking that you would behave with more integrity than you had been called on to show: the abundance of my love, it had seemed to me, raised me above the level of any kind of suspicion and deserved more faithfulness than is ordinarily found. But your intention to betray me must now, in all justice, be set against what you owe me for everything I did for you. I would not stop being very unhappy if you loved me only because I love you. I would want to owe it all solely to the inclination of your heart, but I am very far from being in that position, and I have not received a single letter from you in six months.

I attribute all this misfortune to blindly abandoning myself as I grew attached to you. Should I not have foreseen that my pleasures would end sooner than my love? Could I hope that you would remain all your life in Portugal, that you would give up your fortune and your country all for me? Nothing can relieve my sufferings, and the memory of my pleasures fills me with despair. What! will all my desires, then, be in vain and I shall not see you ever again there before me inside my room, all ardent and dashing. But alas, I deceive myself and I know only too well that all the sensations that filled my heart and head were soon aroused in you by only a few of the pleasures, and subsided with them just as quickly. It was in those moments of overwhelming happiness that I should have called on my reason to help me moderate the disastrous excess of my delights and forewarn me of all the things I suffer now. But I gave myself to you completely and I was in no state to think of what could poison my joy and prevent my enjoying the burning intensity of your passion. I was too aware of

the pleasure it gave me being with you to think that one day you would be gone. Yet, I recall telling you sometimes that I would be unhappy if you were to leave. But my fears soon melted away and it pleased me to sacrifice them to you and to yield to the enchantment and hollowness of the declarations you made to me.

I know very well what would cure all my ills: I would soon be rid of them were I not still in love with you. But, alas, what remedy is that! I would prefer to go on suffering rather than forget you. Yet, does that depend on me? I cannot reproach myself for having wished, for one moment only, not to love you any more. It is you who are more to be pitied, not I. For me it is better to go through all I do than to enjoy all the enfeebling pleasures you get from your mistresses. I do not for one moment envy you your indifference, and I feel very sorry for you. I defy you to forget me completely. I compliment myself on having put you in a position where, without me, you can only have pleasures that cannot fully satisfy you, and I am happier than you because I have more to keep me occupied. I was recently made doorkeeper at the convent. Every one I talk with thinks I am mad. I have no idea how to reply to them. The nuns must be as mad as I am, then, to think me capable of performing my duties. Ah, I envy Emanuel and Francisco their good fortune. Why am I not always with you like them? I would have followed you. I would have served you with a stronger heart. I wish for nothing in this world except to see you. At least remember me. To know you remember me will be enough but I dare not be sure even of that. I did not limit my hopes of your remembering me when I used to see you every day, but you have taught me well that I must submit to your wishes.

Still, I do not blame myself for having adored you. I am glad you seduced me. Your absence is hard for me to bear, and it may be forever, but that does not lessen in the slightest the strength of my love for you. I want the whole world to know it. I make no mystery of it and I am delighted to have done, contrary to all rules of propriety, everything that I did for you. From now onwards my honour and religion will only be in loving you without reserve all my life, the reason being that I have begun to love you.

I am only telling you all these things to oblige you to write. Ah, do not force yourself; all I want is for you to feel moved to write, and I want no controlled language. It will give me pleasure to forgive you if perhaps you cannot trouble yourself to write. And I feel a deep desire to forgive you all your faults. A French officer had the kindness this morning to talk with me about you for more than three hours. He told me that France had now made peace. If that is so, could you not come and see me and take me away with you to France? But I do not deserve it. Do what pleases you. My love no longer depends on the way you may treat me in the future.

Since you left there has not been single moment when I have not I have not felt unwell; and my only pleasure has been repeating your name a thousand times a day. A few of the nuns who are aware of the dreadful state you put me in speak to me of you so often. I leave my room, which you so often visited, as little as possible, and I look continually at your picture which is a thousand times dearer to me than my life. It gives me some pleasure but it also gives me much pain when I think that perhaps I shall not see you again ever. Why must it be possible that I shall not see you again ever? Have you abandoned me for good? I am in despair. Your poor Mariana cannot continue; she is fainting as she ends this letter. Adieu, adieu, Have pity on me.

Third Letter

What will become of me? And what would you have me do? I am so far from all I had foreseen. I had hoped you would be writing to me from all sorts of places and that your letters would be immensely long. I had hoped you would be keeping my passion alive with the prospect of seeing you again and that my total trust in your remaining faithful to me would give me some sort of peace, which would, at least, allow me to live free from my worst pains. I had even had notions, should I know for certain that you had entirely forgotten me, of how I might be able to summon all my strength and get myself well again. Your being so far away, my feelings of devotion to you, the fear of completely ruining what remains of my health with so many wakeful nights and so many worries, the little likelihood of your return, the coolness of your passion and of your goodbyes, your departure with the rather heartless pretexts for it, and a thousand other reasons that are only too feeble - all appeared to promise a safe refuge, were I to need one. Having, when all said and done, only myself to contend with, I was never able to distrust all my weaknesses, nor have any apprehension of what I am going through now.

Alas! how pitiable I am for not sharing my sorrows with you and being the only one who is miserable. The thought is killing me and I am dying of fright at the thought that you may never have placed the highest value on all the pleasures we took together. Yes, I can see clearly now that your manner towards me was sham. You betrayed me every time you told me it thrilled you to be alone with me. I have to thank my own promptings for the attentions and rapturous moments you provided. My inflamed feelings were due to your cold planning. My passion has only been like a victory to you. Deep down your heart never felt anything. Does that not distress you? Have you so little fine feeling that you know of no other gain you could win from me? And how can it be that I with so much love have not been able to make you entirely happy? It is only out of love for you that I am saddened by the thought of the infinite number of pleasures you have foregone. Can it simply

be that you did not want to enjoy them? Ah, if you knew them you would certainly find them finer than the one that took advantage of me. And you would have discovered that one is far more fortunate and is affected much more richly when one loves fervently than when one is the beloved.

I do not know who I am, nor what I am doing, nor what I desire. I am torn by a thousand conflicting emotions. Can one imagine a state so deplorable? I love you to distraction and enough, perhaps, to not even dare wish the same torments upon you. I would kill myself, or die of grief without the need to kill myself, if I had reason to believe that you were having not a moment's peace, that your life were nothing but anxiety and confusion, that you were forever in tears, and that everything was hateful to you. I can scarcely endure my own ills; how, then, could I bear the pain of yours as well when they would increase my burden a thousandfold?

Yet, I cannot bring myself to wish that you no longer gave any thought to me. To speak the honest truth I am furiously jealous of everything that gives you pleasure in France. I do not know why I write to you. I see clearly that you will only have pity for me, and what I do not want is your pity. I despise myself when I look back on all I've sacrificed for you. I have lost my reputation. I have left myself open to the fury of my parents, to the severity of this country's laws against nuns, and to your ingratitude, which appears to me to be the greatest of all my woes.

But for all that, I feel my remorse is not real, and that in my heart of hearts I had rather face the greatest dangers because of my love for you, and that I take a fatal pleasure in having gambled my life and my honour. Ought not everything that I hold most precious be at your disposal? And ought not I be delighted to have put it to such use? Though I seem barely content with my sorrows or with the surfeit of my love, alas, I cannot claim to have found contentment with you. I live, infidel that I am, and do as much to preserve my life as I do to lose it. Ah! I am dying from the shame of it all. Do you think my despair is only in my letters? If I loved you as much as I have told you a thousand times, would I not have died long ago? I have deceived you: now it is for you to blame me. Alas! why do you not complain? I saw you leave. I cannot hope to see you ever again, and yet I still draw breath. I have failed you and I ask your forgiveness. But do not grant it me. Treat me severely. Say straight out that my feelings are not fierce enough. Be harder to please. Send me word that you wish me to die of love for you. I beg you to help me surmount the weakness of my sex and replace all my waverings with true despair. Doubtless a tragic end would oblige you to think of me often. My memory would be dear to you and you would, perhaps, be deeply affected by such an extraordinary death. Would not that be better than the state you have reduced me to?

Adieu, how I wish I had never seen you. Ah! how keenly I feel the falseness of that sentiment, and as I write I recognise that I would far rather be unhappy loving you than never having seen you. So, without a murmur, I consent to the poverty of my fate since you have not wanted to enrich it. Adieu, promise me that if I die from sorrow you will remember me with tenderness; and that at least the fierceness of my passion will make you recoil from such things. That will be sufficient consolation for me; and if I have to leave you forever I would not want to leave you to another woman. Surely you would not be so cruel as to use my despair to make yourself more worthy of being loved, presenting yourself as the man who inspired the greatest passion in the world? Adieu once more. The letters I write to you are too long. I should have thought of you reading them. I ask you to forgive me for that, and I am daring to hope that you will make some allowance for a poor, crazed woman who was not like that before she loved you. Adieu. It seems to me I speak too often to you about the state I am in, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the despair you cause me and I hate the tranquility of my life before I knew you. Adieu. My passion grows every moment. Ah, what things I have to tell you!

Fourth Letter

Your lieutenant has just told me that a storm has forced you to put back to port in the kingdom of Algarve. I fear you may have been through a great deal at sea and this apprehension has so filled my mind that I have given no thought to my sorrows. Do you really think that your lieutenant is more concerned about what happens to you than I am? Why is he better informed? In short, why have you not written to me at all? I am truly unfortunate if you have not been able to find any opportunity of doing so since you left; and all the more unfortunate if you had the chance and did not write. You are unjust and ungrateful in the extreme, but I would despair if these faults brought you any misfortune and I would much rather they went unpunished than see myself avenged.

I resist all the signs that should convince me that you hardly love me at all. I feel more drawn to abandoning myself blindly to my passion than to complaining of your neglect. What anxieties you would have spared me if your behaviour had been as listless in the first days I saw you as they have appeared to me to have been for some time past. But who would not have been deceived as I was by your eager attention and who would not have taken it to be sincere? How hard it is for one to continue to question the good faith of those one loves? I can clearly see that it needs only the least excuse for me to pardon you; and though you do not trouble yourself for any of mine, the love I bear you serves you so faithfully that I cannot consent to your being found guilty, unless it

be for the sake of enjoying the appreciable pleasure of justifying you myself. You won me with your constant attentions. You fanned the flame of my passion with your delights. You charmed me with your kindnesses. You banished my fears with your vows. But it was the fierceness of my own affections that seduced me—and what were such sweet and happy beginnings are now only tears and sighs and a fated death. And there is no remedy whatsoever that lies within my power.

It is true that loving you brought me delights that surprised me greatly, but it was at the cost of sorrows I could not have imagined, and all the commotion you cause inside me is extreme. If I had stubbornly resisted your love, if I had given you reason to feel let down or jealous in order to inflame you and make you burn with desire, if you had detected anything insincere in the way I treated you, if I had wanted to apply my reason to the natural affection I felt for you, which you soon made me perceive--doubtless my own efforts would have been unnecessary--then you could punish me severely and put the power you have over me to rightful use. But the way you looked brought love into my mind and that was before you told me you loved me. You declared a great passion. I was overjoyed and forsook everything in order to love you completely.

You were not blinded as I was. Why, then, did you let me fall into the state you find me in? What did you want from all my raptures? You knew very well you would not always be in Portugal. And why did you choose to make me unhappy? Doubtlessly you might have found here in this country some woman more beautiful than me, one with whom you could have had just as much pleasure—since you only pursued the grosser kind—one who would have loved you faithfully for as long as she had you with her, one whom time would have consoled for your absence, one whom you could have left behind without being treacherous and cruel. Yours are more the actions of a tyrant bent on persecution than the actions of a lover who should only seek to please.

Alas! why do you put a heart through so many ordeals when it belongs to you? It is plain to me that you let yourself be turned against me just as easily as I let myself be convinced in your favour. Without need of all your love, and unaware that I was doing anything extraordinary, I would have resisted far stronger arguments than those which would have obliged you to leave me. To me they would have appeared feeble and there is not a single one of them could have torn me from you. But you wanted to make the most of the pretext you found for returning to France. A vessel was sailing. Why did you not let it sail? Your family had written to you. Do you not know about all the persecution I had from mine? Your honour urged you to abandon me. What heed did I pay mine? You were obliged to go and serve your king. If all I hear of him is true, he has no need of your assistance and he would

have excused you.

I would have been only too happy if we could have spent our lives together, but since a cruel absence necessarily keeps us apart, it seems to me that I have the comfort of knowing that I have not been unfaithful and that I would not have been willing to commit so base for all the world. Indeed! You knew the depth of my longing and the tenderness of my feelings and yet you could resolve to leave me forever and expose me to all the fears I am bound to have that you will no longer remember me except when you sacrifice me for some new passion. I am a woman gone mad for love of you. Yet I do not complain of the fierce feelings in my heart. I am accustomed to their oppression. I could not live without the one pleasure that I find and enjoy in loving you in the midst of a thousand sorrows. But I am burdened and tormented ceaselessly by the rage and disgust I have for everything. I cannot bear my family, my friends, and this convent. Everything I am forced to see and everything I have to do is hateful to me. I am so jealous of my passion it seems as if all my actions and all my duties have to do with you.

Yes, I sometimes have misgivings if I do not devote every minute of my life to you. What, alas, would I do if my heart were not filled with so much rage and so much love? Could I outlive that which occupies my thoughts continually and lead instead a dull, quiet life? I am not one for emptiness and lack of feeling. Everyone has noticed the complete change in my humour, in the way I act, and in my person. Mother Superior spoke of it to me, sharply at first, and afterwards with a degree of kindness. I do not know what I said in reply. I have a feeling I made a full confession to her. The strictest nuns pity the state I am in and it has even invested them with a certain amount of consideration and gentleness on my account. Everyone is touched by my love. And you remain profoundly indifferent, writing me letters that are cold and full of repetitions. Half the pages have blank areas, making it crudely obvious that you are dying to be shot of them.

Dona Brites plagued me lately about leaving my room. Believing she could take my mind off things she took me for a stroll on the balcony from where you get a view of Mertola. I followed her and was immediately assailed by a cruel memory which had me in tears for the rest of the day. She brought me back and I threw myself onto my bed where I asked myself a thousand times what prospect there was of my ever recovering. Whatever is done to make me feel better only increases the bitterness of my grief. Even in the very remedies I find reasons of my own for adding to my distress. That was the place I often saw you. You would pass by with an air that held me in its spell. And I was on the same balcony on that fateful day when I began to experience the first effects of my unfortunate passion. I thought you were wanting to please me, even

though we were not acquainted. I persuaded myself that you had singled me out from among all the others who were with me. I imagined that when you stopped you were delighted that I could then see you better and admire your skill and the graceful ease with which you controlled your horse. My heart was in my mouth when you had to make a difficult manoeuvre; in short, I was secretly attracted by the way you did everything. I felt quite sure you were not indifferent to me and I assumed that it was for me that you were doing it all.

You know only too well all the things that resulted from these beginnings and though I have nothing to hide I must not mention them for fear of making you more guilty (if that were possible) than you are already, and to avoid having to reproach myself for making so many pointless efforts to oblige you to be faithful to me. You will certainly never be that. Can I expect my letters and my reproaches to have more effect on your ingratitude than my love and desertion could? My misfortune tells me all I need to know. Your unjust conduct leaves not the slightest doubt in my mind; and because you have abandoned me I must dread everything that lies ahead. Will your charms have been only for me? Will you not appear pleasing to other eyes? I do not think I shall be angry if the feelings of others in some way justify my own, and I would wish every woman in France to find you charming—provided none of them fall in love with you, and none of them appeal to you. But the idea is ridiculous and could never happen. Besides, I have sufficient proof that you are not really capable of forming a strong attachment and that you need no one's assistance nor the constraint of a new passion to forget me quite. Would I, perhaps, like it if you had some kind of reasonable excuse? It would make me more unhappy, it is true, but it would make you less guilty.

It is clear to me that you will be staying in France, with no great joy in view but entirely free. Then what is keeping you from returning here? The weariness of a long sea voyage? A modicum of propriety? The fear that you cannot match my passionate abandon? Ah! have no fear of me! It will be enough for me to see you from time to time, and knowing we live in the same place. But perhaps I am flattering myself and you will be more taken with another woman's strictness and severity than ever you were with my favours. Is it possible that being treated badly is what inflames your feelings? But before you engage in any great passion give thought to the surfeit of my sorrows, to the uncertainty of my future, to the turmoil of my feelings, to the extravagance of my letters, to my confidences, to my wishes, to my jealousy! Ah, you will feel miserable. I implore you to pay heed to the condition I am in and at least let my suffering be of some service to you.

Five or six months ago, to my great annoyance, you confessed (with more candour than I welcomed) that you loved a lady in your own country. If she is preventing

you from coming here, tell me truthfully so I can put an end to my pining. There is a vestige of hope that I still cling to and if there is nothing to come of it I would as soon lose it at a stroke, and myself with it. Send me a picture of her together with one of her letters. Tell me everything she says to you. Perhaps that way I might find things that will console me, or add to my distress. I cannot remain in my present state any longer and any change at all will do me good. I would also like to have a picture of your brother and of your sister-in-law. I cherish everything about you and I worship everything that is connected with you. I am bereft of any thoughts regarding my own happiness. There are times when I feel humble enough to serve the one you love. Your bad treatment of me and your disdain have left me so dejected that are times when I dare not even think, lest I imagine it possible for me to be jealous without displeasing you, and that I am doing you the greatest wrong imaginable with all my reproaches. I am often convinced that I ought not to make you see, as I do when I am in a rage, feelings which you disown.

There is an officer here who has been waiting a long time for this letter. I had made up my mind to write it in such a way that you might accept it and not find it distasteful. But it is too excessive and I must bring it to a close. Alas, it is more than I can do. As I write I feel that I am talking to you and that you are brought closer to me. The next letter will not be as long or as demanding and you will be able to open it knowing this. It is the truth: I must not speak of a passion which displeases you; so I will not speak of it again. In a few days time it will have been almost a year since I gave myself to you wholly and freely. Your passion appeared to me to be most ardent and sincere and I would never have thought that my favours would have so repelled you as to make you travel 500 leagues and lay yourself open to shipwreck to get away from them. I did not deserve such treatment from anyone. You will be able to remember my modesty, my embarrassment, and my confusion. But you will not remember what caused you to love me in spite of yourself. The officer who is to be the bearer of this letter has passed word to me for the fourth time that he wishes to depart. How pressing he is! No doubt he too is forsaking some unfortunate lady in this country.

Adieu, it is costing me more pain finishing my letter than it cost you to leave me, perhaps for ever. I do not dare call you by a thousand loving names; I dare not abandon myself wantonly to all my feelings. I love you a thousand times more than I love my life and a thousand times more than I can think. How dear you are to me and how cruel! You do not write—I could not stop myself reminding you. I am taking up my pen again: the officer will depart. No matter, let him go! I am writing more for my benefit than yours. I am only trying to console myself. Besides, the length of my letter will alarm you and you will not read it. What have I done to be so unhappy? And why have you

poisoned my life? Would that I had been born in another country. Adieu, forgive me! I no longer dare ask you to love me. See how low fate has brought me! Adieu!

Fifth Letter

I am writing to you for the last time, and I hope my different manner and wording will show that you have at last persuaded me that you no longer love me, and that I must, therefore, no longer love you. As a result I will return to you by the first available means all that I still have of yours. Have no fear of my writing to you further. I will not even be the one to write your name on the package: I have entrusted that to Dona Brites who grew accustomed to carrying out secret requests of mine that were much different from this. She will do it on my behalf but impartially. She will take all the necessary precautions so I can be sure you have received the portraits and the bracelets you gave me.

I want you to know, however, that for some days now I have been on the verge of tearing up and burning these tokens of love that were so dear to me. But in previous times I have displayed so much weakness that perhaps you would never believe me capable of doing anything so extreme. So for that reason I want you to sample all the pain I had in letting them go from me; in the very least it may give you a taste of my scorn. I admit, I found myself, to my shame as well as to yours, more attached to these trifles than I wanted you to know, and that even as I was complimenting myself on having no love left for you, once more I had need of all my past reflections in order to part with each particular item. But in the end there were too many good reasons for me not to give way. I put them into Dona Brites's hands. What it cost me to do that after a thousand doubts and waverings which you are not acquainted with and which I shall certainly not explain to you. I implored her never to speak to me of them again and never to return them to me, even if I ask to see them just one more time, and to send them back to you without telling me.

I did not really know how excessive my love had been until I made the choice of putting all my efforts into curing myself of it, and I fear I would not have dared to attempt it if I had foreseen so many difficulties and so much upheaval. I am convinced I would have felt the emotion less unpleasant if I had been acting out of love for you, ungrateful though you are, than out of my determination to leave you for ever. I had the sense that you were less dear to me than was my passion for you. I had strange sorrows to contend with once your insulting behaviour had made your person obnoxious to me.

It was not my woman's pride that helped me turn from

you. I have put up with your scorn. I would have withstood all your hatred and all the jealousy which your attachment to another woman would have aroused in me. At least I would have had some sort of passion to combat. But it is your indifference which I find unbearable. Your impertinent protestations of friendship and the ridiculous courtesies of your last letter have made it clear to me that all the letters which I wrote to you and which you received have brought about no stirrings in your heart. Yet you read them nevertheless.

Ungrateful man, I am still foolish enough to be in despair through not being able to flatter myself that the letters did not reach you, that they were not given to you. I detest your easy concern. Did I ask you to tell me the whole truth? Would that you had left me my love. All you had to do was to not put it in a letter. I was not seeking to be enlightened. Am I not unhappy enough, having been unable to make you take some care when deceiving me, so that I am also unable to forgive you? Know that I regard you as being unworthy of all my feelings and that I am well acquainted with all your base qualities.

Nevertheless, if all that I have done for you merits your giving some small consideration to the favours I ask, I implore you not to write to me any more and help me to forget you completely. If you were to give me some proof, however slight, that you had registered some dismay reading this letter, I would, perhaps, believe you; at the same time perhaps your admission and your sharing my view would arouse my horror and rage and put a torch to everything. So do not interfere with the way I am managing things, because doubtless you would overturn all my plans whatever way you wanted to approach them. I have no wish at all to know the outcome of this letter. Do not upset the kind of spiritual life I am preparing for myself. Whatever purpose you may have had to make me unhappy, it seems to me that you can rest content with all the pains you are causing me. Do not rob me of my uncertainty. I hope in good time to turn it into something peaceful. I promise not to hate you. I distrust violent feelings too much to dare engaging them.

I am sure I could perhaps find in this country a lover more faithful and more handsome; but alas! who will be able to provide me with love? Will someone else's passion be enough for me? Did my love have any sway over you? Am I not proof that a loving heart never forgets the one person who first made it aware of the raptures it could attain? that all the heart's surgings link it to the idol it has made for itself? that first notions, like first wounds, can neither be healed nor effaced? that all the passions that offer their help and strive to fill the heart and satisfy it promise it a sensibility that can never be recaptured? that all the pleasures it seeks (without any desire of finding them) serve only to teach it that nothing is so dear to it as the memory of its

pains? Why did you make known to me the imperfection and waywardness of a bond that cannot last forever, and the misfortunes that follow a violent love when it is not returned, and why a blind tendency and a cruel destiny usually work together selecting for us those who would better suit someone else?

Even if I could hope for some amusement in a new friendship and could find someone honest and open I pity myself to the extent that I doubt I could put the worst man in the world into the same state you have put me into, and even though I am under no obligation to spare you, I would never want to avenge myself on you so cruelly even if it were in my power through some circumstance I had not foreseen.

Right now I am trying to find some way to excuse you. I well understand that a nun does not usually inspire love. However, it seems that if reason were to govern men's choice they would do better attaching themselves to nuns rather than to other women. Nothing prevents nuns thinking continually of their passion; they are not distracted by the thousand and one things there are in the world to divert and exhaust them. It cannot be very pleasing to see the woman one loves always searching for amusement among a thousand trifles. Men need to shed practically all their fine feelings if they mean to tolerate, without falling into despair, the fact that the women talk of nothing else but gatherings, dress fittings, and going for strolls. They are forever exposed to fresh jealousies; they are obliged to be considerate, to be indulgent, to be able to converse well. Can one be sure they derive no pleasure from all that? Can one be sure they do not always meet their husbands' needs with extreme disgust and against their will? O how they must distrust a lover who does not ask them to account for their every move, who happily believes whatever they tell him, who observes them with a placid confidence as they attend humbly to all their duties.

But I am not looking to prove to you by reasoning that you should have loved me; that is a very mean way of doing things, and I have used much better ones without success. I know my fate too well to try to master it. I shall be unhappy all my life. Was I not so when I saw you every day? I was frightened to death you might be unfaithful to me. I wanted to see you all the time, and that was not possible. It troubled me that you took risks coming into the convent. When you went off to war my life ceased. I was in despair at the thought of not being more beautiful and more worthy of you. I used to grumble to myself over my modest standing. I often thought that the attachment you appeared to have for me might harm you in some way. I felt I did not love you enough. I was afraid of the anger my parents would have against you. In short, I was in just as lamentable a state as I am in now.

If only you had given me some indications of your passion after you left Portugal I would have made every effort to leave this place. I would have disguised myself so that I could go and find you. Alas, what would have become of me after I had arrived in France? What an upset, what a scandal, what overwhelming shame for my family whom I cherish so dearly, now that I have stopped loving you. It must be clear to you that my own good sense told me that I could have found myself in a worse state than the one I am in now. For once in my life I am talking to you sensibly. I hope my moderation will please you and that you will be glad for me. However, I do not wish to know. I have already asked you not to write to me any more, and I implore you again not to.

Have you never once reflected on the way you have treated me? Do you never think that you are under more obligation to me than to anyone else in the world? I have loved you like a mad woman. How I despised everything else. Your conduct has not been that of a gentleman. You must have had a natural aversion for me since you have not loved me to distraction. I allowed myself be charmed by very mediocre qualities. What have you ever done to please me? What sacrifice have you made for me? Did you not go off searching for a thousand other pleasures? Have you given up gaming or hunting? Were you not the first to go off to war? And did you not come back after all the others had returned? You gave no thought to your own safety, though I had begged you to take care of yourself for my sake. You never considered how you might go about settling in Portugal, where you were well regarded. One letter from your brother and you were off without a moment's hesitation. And all through the voyage were you not always, so I am told, in the very best of spirits?

I must confess, I am forced into hating you with a deadly hatred. Ah, I have brought all these misfortunes on myself. First I was too guileless in letting you see the great passion I had for you whereas one has to use tricks to become loved. One has to search skilfully for ways to start the flame, and love by itself cannot do that. You wanted me to love you and as you had already laid your plans there was nothing you would not have done to accomplish your aim—you would even have set your mind on loving me, if it had been necessary. However, you knew your plan would succeed without your passion and that you had no need of it. What treachery! Do you think you could have deceived me and there not be any consequences?

Should chance ever bring you back to this country I tell you I will deliver you up to the vengeance of my parents. I have lived for a long time in a state of abandon and in an idolatry that horrifies me. I am hounded by remorse for what I have done and I am deeply ashamed of the crimes you made me commit. I no longer possess the passion that prevented me knowing

the enormity of them. When will my heart cease to be torn? When will I be free from this cruel impediment?

However, I do not think I wish any harm to come to you. I believe I could even consent to your being happy. But how could you be happy if your heart were true? I mean to write you a further letter at some time in the future when I can let you know that I am more at peace. What pleasure it will give me to be able to reproach you for your unjust conduct when I am no longer so keenly affected by it; to be able to say that I despise you, and to be able to speak with so much indifference of your betrayal; to be able to say that I have forgotten all my sorrows, and that I remember you only when I choose to.

I still maintain that you have great advantages over me and that you filled me with a passion that made me lose my reason. But you have little cause to feel flattered. I was young, I was credulous, I had been shut away in this convent since childhood, I had known only people who were unpleasant. I had never heard compliments like the ones you used to give me all the time. I thought I was indebted to you for the charms and the beauty you found in me and made me aware of. People spoke well of you. You did everything that was necessary for you to make me love you. But I have finally cast off that enchantment. You have helped me enormously, and I confess my need of it could not have been greater.

When I return your letters the last two you wrote will remain in my safekeeping and I shall read them more often than I read the first ones, so as not to fall back into my former weaknesses. Ah, what they cost me, and how happy I would have been if you had allowed me to love you always. I am only too aware that I am still somewhat too occupied with my reproaches and your infidelity, but remember that I have promised myself a more peaceful state of mind and that I will either achieve it or take some desperate measure against myself, which will not trouble you unduly. But I want nothing more from you. I am mad to be always repeating the same things. I must leave you and no longer think of you. I even believe this will be my last letter to you. Am I obliged to send you an exact account of all my various emotions?